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SIPDIS

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USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Syria

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz led with a report by Akiva Eldar that on Wednesday, Israel succumbed to international pressure and informed the U.S. that it plans to complete preparations on Friday for operating convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, to begin next week. The newspaper says that Israel will issue a formal announcement on the matter on Friday. According to The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio, Israel will present its convoy plan today. Ha'aretz and Yediot quoted officials in Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's office as saying that the use of convoys is dependent on the security situation and that it might be put on hold in the event of a terrorist attack. Ha'aretz notes that this position differs from the one presented on Monday by IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, who said on Monday that convoys will not operate until rocket fire into Israel stops completely. Israel Radio reported that Deputy Defense Minister Zeev Boim (Kadima) criticized the decision, and quoted him as saying that the PA has not done anything to fight terror and that Israel must withstand U.S. pressure. Ha'aretz reported that A/S David Welch announced on Wednesday that bus convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would begin as scheduled. The newspaper quoted Welch as saying at a London conference of donors to the PA: "We fully expect Israel and the Palestinians to implement all aspects of the movement agreement on schedule and we will help them to do so." Yediot headlined: "The Americans Pressured -- Israel Folded."

All media (lead stories only in the religious newspapers) reported that at 16:00 on Wednesday, an IAF missile killed four militants on their way to carry out an attack at the Karni crossing on the Gaza-Israel border. The media cited the IDF as saying that one of the militants worked at the crossing and had been planning to use the information he had gained from his job to carry out the attack. The media said that the militants were members of two Fatah-linked groups: the Salah a-Din Brigades, which is the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The media reported that, following the strike, the Popular Resistance Committees fired two Qassam rockets and a mortar shell at Sderot. No injuries were reported. The media also quoted Palestinian sources as saying that Khader Habib, an Islamic Jihad leader in the Gaza Strip, survived an Israeli air strike at 21:00. The media cited the IDF as saying that the attack was aimed at Islamic Jihad members involved in launching Qassam rockets and mortar shells at Israel. The media reported that Mofaz instructed the IDF on Wednesday to act immediately against rocket-launching cells in Gaza, in the wake of ongoing Qassam attacks. Leading media reported that last night in Nablus, an IDF paratrooper unit uncovered

a Hamas bomb factory, which contained 60 kg of explosives -- one of the largest quantities ever seized in the West Bank.

Yediot bannered a threat by FM Silvan Shalom's supporters that, should Knesset Member Binyamin Netanyahu win in the Likud primaries, they would vote for PM Sharon's Kadima party. The newspaper quoted Shalom's supporters as saying at a gathering Wednesday that Netanyahu has harmed Sephardic Israelis. Yediot quoted Netanyahu as saying that he would free Israel from poverty.

Leading media reported that leaders of the Fatah movement's young guard have registered a separate list for the PA's parliamentary elections next month. Ha'aretz reported that Marwan Barghouti, the Tanzim leader jailed in Israel, heads the list (according to Israel Radio, it is not sure whether Barghouti would be No. 1 on the Fatah list or establish a new party), followed by Civilian Affairs Minister Muhammad Dahlan, National Security Adviser Jibril Rajoub, and a senior Fatah activist from the Gaza Strip, Samir Mesharawi. Ha'aretz wrote that the independent list, named Al-Mustaqbal (Arabic for "The Future"), was presented to the Central Elections Commission in Ramallah on Wednesday. Israel Radio reported that Sharon's bureau authorized a phone conversation between Barghouti and PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli and international sources as saying at the conference of donors to the PA that the PA was denied extra funds at the conference because it failed to adhere to spending limitations.

Ha'aretz reported that on Wednesday, FM Shalom called on all countries in the world to condemn comments by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who called the Holocaust a "myth." The newspaper reported that on Wednesday, Meretz-Yahad chair Yossi Beilin called on all countries to recall their ambassadors to Iran. Leading media reported that on Wednesday, Ahmadinejad suggested that Israel should be moved to the U.S. -- in particular to Alaska -- or to Canada.

Ha'aretz quoted Sharon aides as saying on Wednesday that pollster Kalman Gayer is not a member of Sharon's inner circle and that he is therefore not privy to the PM's secret plans. In an interview Gayer reportedly gave to Newsweek magazine, Gayer was quoted as saying that "theoretically" Sharon would be willing to pull out of most of the West Bank and divide Jerusalem for peace with the Palestinians. Leading media reported that on Wednesday, Sharon again denied the comments at a gathering of a road-safety organization at Tel Aviv University. He was quoted as saying: "There is no limit to the incitement and lie spreading these days. We have reached the peak of absurdity yesterday with slogans that I intend to divide Jerusalem." However, Yaron Dekel, Israel TV's Washington correspondent, who first reported on the affair, said Wednesday that the conversation between the Newsweek reporter and Gayer was held face to face and was documented. Dekel said that Gayer had not denied or protested the report, and that none of Sharon's advisers had asked to clarify the issue.

Ha'aretz cited a report released by Physicians For Human Rights-Israel, according to which the section of the West Bank separation fence surrounding Jerusalem seriously impinges on the accessibility and quality of medical services received by tens of thousands of Palestinian East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza residents.

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that the security cabinet decided on Wednesday that responsibility for issuing security warnings to Israelis traveling or residing abroad will be transferred from Israel's National Security Council to the Foreign Ministry in three months' time, in the wake of quiet wrangling between the two entities.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday, the chairman of the Knesset Subcommittee for Strategic Security, Knesset Member Ephraim Sneh (Labor), criticized the fact that there is no protection for Israeli passenger planes against shoulder-launched missiles, and called this a "grave security failure." Ha'aretz quoted Sneh as saying that the reason for this failure is that the Rafael Armament Development Authority was forced to stop manufacturing the protective equipment, which costs USD 1 million for each plane. The Jerusalem Post quoted Sneh as saying that Netanyahu was to blame for the budget cuts. Ha'aretz also quoted Sneh as saying that the cuts to

the defense budget have hurt Israel's ability to protect itself against the Iranian threat.

Yediot and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Wednesday, the UN decided to grant a special status to three Israeli NGOs: Shatil (an umbrella organization of groups advocating social change in Israel), the Israeli Women's Lobby, and Zaka, which works in rescue and recovery assignments following terrorist attacks.

Israel Radio reported that the UN Security Council has agreed to extend by another six months the work of the investigation commission into the assassination of former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri.

Jerusalem Post led with a story by its Washington correspondent Matthew Guttman, who covers the Iraqi legislative elections on the ground.

Ha'aretz reported that two Israeli-Arab comics from Haifa, Ayman Nahas and Hanna Shammass, who criticize the state and the IDF, enjoy great popularity among Israeli-Arab audiences.

Ha'aretz front-paged the results of a Ha'aretz/Channel 10-TV poll carried out last night by the Amanet Group's Dialogue Institute, which indicate that after three weeks of an unfettered rise in the polls, Sharon's Kadima party is changing direction and beginning to slide backward. The survey found that, were elections held now, Kadima would win 35 seats, four seats fewer than last week, and Labor would win two more seats, bringing to 24. Likud stayed stable at 12 seats. Ha'aretz quoted Sharon associates as saying that the loss is a slightly belated result of the "Hanegbi-Mofaz effect," a reference to two Likud officials -- Tzachi Hanegbi and Mofaz -- who switched their allegiance to Kadima last week and apparently deterred some Labor voters who had been willing to support Sharon's party. The poll shows that Labor's gain seems came at Kadima's expense, but that some 20 percent of Likud voters who switched to Kadima shortly after founded it have left in the last few days.

-The survey also asked respondents whether they believed in Gayer or Sharon. While 47 percent believe in Gayer, 28 percent believe in Sharon, and 25 percent are undecided.

-The survey asked who would better handle the Iranian threat. Sharon: 43 percent; Netanyahu: 13 percent; Amir Peretz: 6 percent; and Silvan Shalom: 4 percent.

Ha'aretz reported that the Dialogue Institute poll found that 40 percent of registered Likud members would vote for Netanyahu; 23 percent for Shalom; 9 percent for far-right contender Moshe Feiglin; and 2 percent for Yisrael Katz. In the case of a runoff primary, Netanyahu would defeat Shalom, 46 to 29 percent.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "One could have expected that such a brave leader [Sharon] would respond to the new-old Likud slogan ['Sharon will divide Jerusalem'] by saying that Jerusalem will be divided -- because that is in Israel's interest."

Veteran columnist Yaron London wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "There is no choice but to lead the election campaign towards a discussion of Sharon the man, and draw conclusions from his past regarding his future."

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "It is time for Washington to realize that the renewed outburst of radicalism in the Middle East is being caused by it, in many ways."

Block Quotes:

I. "Jerusalem Will Be Divided"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 15): "Jerusalem has never been united. The fundamental key to the division was determined by Bill Clinton: what's Jewish goes to the Jews and what's Arab goes to the Arabs.... Election campaigns tend to hide controversial messages so as to win as many votes as possible. For that reason, it is clear why Kadima officials were alarmed by comments on Jerusalem [made

in an interview with Newsweek by Sharon's adviser on polling affairs, Kalman Gayer]. But when the sole justification for the existence of Kadima is those same 'painful concessions' that Sharon was unable to implement under the Likud, this frenzy is a worrying sign that Sharon himself does not know what his political objectives are. Perhaps he is planning to spend an entire term resting on the laurels of the disengagement from Gaza. One could have expected that such a brave leader would respond to the new-old Likud slogan ['Sharon will divide Jerusalem'] by saying that Jerusalem will be divided -- because that is in Israel's interest."

II. "The Platform Is the Man, the Man Is the Platform"

Veteran columnist Yaron London wrote in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (November 13): "Kadima is Ariel Sharon, and it would appear that no one knows what this man wants.... Therefore, there is no choice but to lead the election campaign towards a discussion of Sharon the man, and draw conclusions from his past regarding his future. His actions are well known, but people have a short memory and are inclined to be impressed by the near past and to forget what took place in the many decades in which he filled important political positions. There is no doubt that one of his most important actions was his great contribution to the settlements in the occupied territories.... On this matter, one cannot avoid a dichotomous judgment: either Sharon is making a terrible mistake in aspiring to remove the settlements located in the heart of the Palestinian population, or else he made a terrible mistake by establishing them.... Rivers of ink and cascades of words have been spent on Sharon's role in the Lebanon War. Many things, mainly the secrets of the grandiose plan that aimed to remove the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon to the kingdom of Jordan, are still concealed, but what is known is enough to fear the thought that this charismatic and reckless person, who misled the members of the cabinet in which he served, will determine our future.... The war he initiated cost us over 1,000 fatalities, thousands of people injured, a sizeable fortune and a deep rift in Israeli society. A responsible citizen will not go to the polls before refreshing his memory with the aid of books [by Israeli journalists] about this [war], books whose reliability was tested in court."

III. "Returning From the Point of No Return"

Middle East affairs commentator Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 15): "An unbelievable provocation, this is the logical meaning of the anti-Semitic challenge recently issued by Tehran -- statements the likes of which the world has not heard from such a senior echelon since World War II -- and Damascus's defiant actions.... Iran and Syria do so knowing that no harm will be done to them by the United States or the world.... Washington has only itself to blame: the zigzag in its policy has brought it to the regional crisis. In President Bush's first term of office, Washington advocated the 'axis of evil' theory.... In the second term, however, Condoleezza Rice displayed a new, softened, European approach towards the Arab dictatorships.... It is time for Washington to realize that the renewed outburst of radicalism in the Middle East is being caused by it, in many ways, and that it should return to the old policy of deterrence accompanied by firm diplomatic action. Not only condemnations, which are currently being voiced with regard to the Iranian statements and the Syrian assassinations, but real action, including economic and diplomatic sanctions, as were imposed on Libya, until this country yielded to the international dictates.... This also means that the concept of the point of no return should be abandoned.... If ... steps are not taken immediately, there is a high probability that the old Middle East will soon return, along with terrorism, despair and lack of hope -- and above all these will hover an Iranian nuclear umbrella. The entire world should understand clearly the significance of nuclear weapons over the world's reserves of fuel in the Persian Gulf."

12. Syria:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The United States is practically alone

in urging punishment for Syria."

Nationalist writer Uri Dan commented in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The current U.S. administration has drawn a clear separation line between democracy and dictatorship, good and evil, and the threat of sanctions is aimed at those who earned it by means of lies and murders."

Block Quotes:

I. "Bullying the West"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 15): "Even after [Gibran] Tueni's car was blown up on Monday -- it was the third political assassination of a prominent Lebanese critic of Syria since the murder of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri in February -- the United Nations has so far only shaken its finger at Syria, opening an investigation of the Hariri murder but not yet considering imposing any sanctions.... The United States is practically alone in urging punishment for Syria.... Much of the international diplomatic community is resisting U.S. efforts to do so.... The Syria situation, though not as potentially catastrophic as the Iranian nuclear threat, is just as crucial a test for the UN. For years, Israel's military presence in southern Lebanon served as Syria's excuse for brutalizing its neighbor. But when the IDF withdrew from Lebanon, it removed that excuse and exposed the Assad regime as just an opportunistic bully of the Lebanese people. Teheran and Damascus are, indeed, displaying all the hallmarks of the classic bully.... The bullying cycle of condemnation and escalation only ends when the bully's normally peaceable victims tire of living in fear and collectively stand up to their tormentors. Sometimes this can be put off, but not indefinitely. Bullies do not just go away, they try to amass more power with which to intimidate. To that end, the people of Lebanon showed more courage and conviction in Beirut on Wednesday than the leaders of the free world have shown."

II. "The Penny Has Dropped"

Nationalist writer Uri Dan commented in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 15): "In December 1955, Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban, dispatched urgent messages to [then prime minister] David Ben-Gurion, which stated that the U.S. and the [UN] Security Council threatened to impose sanctions on Israel over retaliatory actions it had carried out against Syrian outposts east of the Sea of Galilee. The goal of the operation had been to remove the threat of Syrian fire on Israeli fishermen in the Sea of Galilee.... Now, 50 years later, in December 2005, the current U.S. administration has drawn a clear separation line between democracy and dictatorship, good and evil, and the threat of sanctions is aimed at those who earned it by means of lies and murders. Neither Clinton's Democratic administration nor Ronald Reagan's Republican administration were able to perceive that distinction.... 'Haste is the work of Satan,' says an Arabic proverb. Fifty years have gone by since the Sea of Galilee operation. Only now -- perhaps -- are the bad ones being punished."

CRETZ